

Changing Gender Relations and Agricultural Labour Migration: Reconsidering The Link



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Introduction

- **Agriculture is a principal source of livelihood for Moroccan population:**
 - It provides more than one third of employment (39,3% in 2013) (HCP, 2014).
 - The sector is characterized as female-intensive: women compromise a majority of the labor force in agriculture (employment rates among women :41,1%) (HCP, 2014).

- **The expansion of female employment with the increase of agricultural export production**
 - Rural women have been integrated into a new form of seasonal agricultural labour in large numbers. They are invisible group, yet they play a key role at the forefront of one of Morocco's key economic sectors.
- **underestimation of women in the calculation of the agricultural labour force**
 - No official information or statistics regarding the number of women employed seasonally in agricultural production.

Context

- The economic liberalization, the agrarian changes and drought impacted deeply the countryside and the rural society structure.
- The rural householders, especially the landless, face the difficulty to increase their earnings to afford their basic needs.
- The internal migration embodies an alternate dimension in their *strategies* of livelihood regarding to an environment characterized by poverty and domestic agriculture's dependency as a main source of income.

- The modernization of agriculture promotes an increase in the number of waged- workers, seasonal in particular.
- Thus, the preponderance of women among migrants is the consequence of the rising demand for female labour force in the agricultural regions.

Research question

To what extent the incorporation of women in the agricultural labour has impacted gender relations?

Methodology

- **Study area:** two agricultural areas
 - **Souss Massa region:** *Chtouka ait baha* province (Khmis Ait Amira),
 - **North-East region:** *Berkane* province (*Douar ghraba 1 and douar ghraba2*).
- **methods:**
 - **Quantitative approach:** Questionnaire,
 - **Qualitative approach:** In-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted with women and men.
- The qualitative data used are collected between 2012 and 2016.

1/ Decisions on agricultural labour migration

- The growing participation of rural women in the waged agricultural workforce reflects the need of rural households to increase and diversify their income sources as it entails a shaped gender relations.
 - **Determinants of migration do not differ for men and women.**
- Due to the differential economic opportunities that women and men face in agricultural work, women play an active role in migration decisions.
 - **Women are not seen as an appendage of man's migration.**
- Women's engagement in agricultural labour migration was seen to reflect the men's incapacity to fulfil their roles as the breadwinners of the households.
 - **The presumed passivity in the women migratory process is ignored.**

2/ Decisions on women's entry into waged agricultural labour

- In most cases, women had a major role in deciding to enter into waged work.
- A number of women took the decision and their husbands agreed. In order to save money, the men allow their wives to join non-traditional agricultural export production (fieldwork, processing or packing).
- Working in the agro-industry is seen as *formal* and *respectable* and relatively better working conditions in comparison with *mouqef* (traditional labour recruitment market).
- Rarely are the women who are encouraged by their husbands to work in agricultural labour.

3/Agricultural Wage Gap(1)

- **Gender differentiated occupations:** Women and men don't practice the same types of tasks due to the tasks nature and the force which demands. Men are often expected to do any tasks requiring **physical force** or involve **the use of tools** or in **supervision positions**. Otherwise, women are often expected to do **meticulous** and **rigorous** tasks.

“women have a light-weight and every agricultural activity is closest to the ground is their own specialization. However, men have a heavy weight, they cannot bend their knees and crouch down ”(statement of a farmer)

- The wage-work opportunities offered to women and men are based on a strong gender segregation of tasks as it led to different income.

3/Agricultural Wage Gap(2)

The intensity of agricultural work within seasons:

- The wage-work opportunities offered to women are flexible and are for a limited period of time. Men's work tends to be more stable with less flexibility.

“women are not always available in the moqaf for seeking a job. They have other tasks to do in their households during the week. They can work from 3 to 4 days per week depending on their will. The money they earn from agricultural work can only be complementary to that of the household... It is only for doing Tontine with other women ” (male worker statement, 52 years old).

3/Agricultural Wage and Gender gap(3)

Type of the farm and the crops produced:

The farmers having large farms pay less than those who have small or medium farms. The wage is proportional to the farm size: the more the farm size is larger, the more it demands an important workers' mass, the more it demands money.

For example a farmer states that *“one hectare of potatoes needs 20women(12euro), 20men (15euro)and 10 other men for storing at the truck(20euro), which costs him about 1000euros/day including their foods and transports.”* (farmer, Northeast region)

3/Agricultural Wage and Gender gap(4)

Type of the crops produced: the example of potatoes harvesting

- The season of potato harvesting constitutes the period of the highest income, whether for women or men. It is about 10-12euro/day for women doing picking up potatoes from the ground and about 13-15 euro/ day for men extracting potato from the ground with an ax.
- The high income in this period is explained by the nature of the cultivation. Potatoes require an imminent harvesting otherwise, the farmer risks lose his production. So the workers demand a high daily income as the farmers prefer to increase the wage for workers in order to not lose any of the production.

4/ Women's socio-economic status

- **From unwaged family workers/housewives to waged agricultural laborers:**
 - Agricultural labour migration provides to women a wage as it could be the main opportunity through which they could expect to become financially independent.
- **(In)Visibility of Women's seasonal agricultural labour:**
 - Women's agricultural work is visible in their households and perceived as the indispensable income source for the family despite of its irregularity and its precarious working conditions.

- **Women as “breadwinner”?:**

- The economic contribution of Women’s agricultural labour is recognized by the household members. Women take the new role as the main source of money for the household.
- The agricultural labour is considered as a source of employment for women. It is flexible, irregular and insecure, yet women laborers are often presented by employers and other members of the family as only working for **pin money**.

5/Wage and Changing gender relations(1)

- **Men's and Women's Share and Expenditure**
 - The majority of Men's earnings is spent on personal consumption, Personal project, business migration to Europe. The Household expenditure and the education of their children come in the last.
 - Women spend very little on their personal needs. Diverse household expenditure, the education of their children and saving some money for *the future* are the main features.

5/Wage and Changing gender relations(2)

- Despite that the wages of men *seem to be* higher than of women, it is women's contribution that becomes the substantial part when it comes to the household expenditure.
- Three models developed:
 - cash-home: “what's mine is his”.
 - sharing of expenses.
 - savings *for the uncertain future*.

- ***Cash-home model:***

- The wage earnings are used to pay: renting, invoices and food.
- The rest is for school furniture, clothes, home modification, debt repayment, tontine contribution that serves to big household expenditure (travel, ceremonies) or for *crisis period* such as medical treatment.
- This model is based on the women's entry into wage-work bargaining. The women waged-work constitutes the equilibrium of the household earnings.

- ***Expenses Sharing model:***

- It is based on the wage negotiation by making arrangements

“ My husband hesitate to own a home. As a first step, I tried to convince him... but finally a specific arrangement ought to be made. I proposed that I deal with debt repayment while he deals with household expenditures, provided that such arrangement led to the house ownership for both of us, and that has made it possible”.
(woman worker, 36 years old, Souss region).

- the women’s economic contribution in the household increases their negotiation power.

However,

- *Unbalanced expenses sharing model:*

Increase economic role of women could have been used as a pretext for men to reduce their household contributions, even their withdrawal.

- The women wage removes the responsibility of husbands and increases the pressure on women that they spend all their wages.

- ***Savings for the uncertain future model:***

Saving is considered as the productive accumulation for women, which serve to *overcome financial problems* the family face or it is considered as *personal property* in rare cases.

Do agricultural labour empower women or alter gender relations?

- The socioeconomic status of women had a significant impact on the traditional gender roles,
- Agricultural labour wage give to women an increased decision-making within their intra-household relations and in their relationships with men,
- Little change in the gender division of labour within the household with regard to reproductive work.

- Due to the agricultural labour, women assert themselves in the households and control the resources.
- If the economic autonomy evokes the ability to maintain their financial situation and of their owns as to the ability to decide how these resources are used, the women's economic contribution changed gender relations.

However,

- Despite the evidence that women's earnings are essential to household survival strategies, as it entails to empower women within their households, women's engagement in agricultural labour migration led to their *pseudo-emancipation* since they carried out all forms of flexible work. Hence, gender relations may at any time be **reshaped** and **renegotiated**.

